

That Other Life

By: SlyGrovyale

Delving into their dark upbringing in the depths of Oat's Prismatic Jungle, "That Other Life" follows the story of Vagus and his older brother, Mycaelis, as they are raised to meet the standards of their warrior-minded parents and obligate themselves to a life of mystery and danger. In a jungle such as this danger comes in many forms, some of which will change the lives of the two siblings forever.

That Other Life are a series of short stories that were originally posted on [Deviantart](#) in 2014 to serve as a backstory for Vagus and his brother Mycaelis, two of the protagonists from the Web Comic [PMD: Tales of Elysium](#), a comic inspired by Pokemon Mystery Dungeon. These stories have now been put into chapters and bound together within a single story.

Check out our [Patreon](#) for advance comic updates and bonus content.

This story and its chapters were illustrated by [Haychel](#)

Status: complete

Published: 2021-02-04

Words: 13323

Chapters: 6

Original source: <https://archiveofourown.org/works/29186190>

That Other Life

[Introduction](#)

[Monsters](#)

[Expectations](#)

[Brothers](#)

[Visitors](#)

[Shadows](#)

[Conclusions](#)

Monsters

Chapter 1: Monsters



A new day brought with it another bout of pain, another set of bruises and more long hours of bleeding and sweating under the jungle's humid canopy. Left, right, back, back, back, right, another right, quick left, quick right... not quick enough. Crack! Bells were ringing in Mycaelis' head when it collided with a thick tree trunk. The shock of the impact was just as familiar as the pain of splinters digging under his skin.

All familiar and all reoccurring, it was part of yet another training session with his father. For years in the jungle Mycaelis had been beaten down, and for years more he had always gotten back up to be beaten down again.

The cycle was endless and had only but one goal: To destroy who Mycaelis was in order to pursue perfection. A soul was but one of many flaws he had been born with that needed to be remedied. To his father, a soul was an imperfection, a defect, a sickness, one that kept a healthy Charmander like him from reaching his fullest potential. The cycle was not always the same, when the sickness in Mycaelis began to recede, his father would arrange for harder and more difficult cycle of training to begin.

"Had enough?" His father, a hulking Feraligatr loomed over him, asking a question that he had asked many times before.

The question was rhetorical. It always had been. The training would continue regardless of what he said. Instead Mycaelis spoke with actions, leaping from the ground and latching onto his father's head. He was weak and his muscles ached, but that didn't stop the Charmander from roaring and letting a salvo of fists fly into his father's skull. His small hands impacted like flies against a pane of glass, enough to make his father chuckle with pride and throw the youth from his head.

Abstinence and bravery in the face of defeat or overwhelming odds were a key principle in Mycaelis' training. This was a part of his education that Mycaelis had learned well; to keep fighting until he was nothing but a bloodied corpse and to look death in the eye and

greet it with a smile. To discard his feelings, his emotions, his fears, the very ailments that held him back yet made him who he was. None of his desires mattered; he was to be a warrior, the finest in all the known world.

Mycaelis lay beaten on the jungle floor, the thick and cold soil sticking to his sweat laden body. The morning sun was reaching its peak, seeping through the jungle canopy in rays, one which bathed his father in a divine radiance. The Feraligatr was huge, a colossus who stood a full head, and fin, taller than others of his species. His body, tattered by battle and time, was still very much in its prime, boasting muscles as hard as iron. His might, his stance, his glare, even his scars; Mycaelis wanted them, he wanted them all, he wanted to be every bit the man his father was. From the moment of his hatching, this was the only goal he ever had.

“Get up, Son. On yer feet.” His father did nothing but cross his arms and glare, he knew that he didn’t have to do anything else.

Mycaelis did as ordered. Like a marionette, he felt the strings of iron discipline pull at his limbs until he was standing upright. He tried to stare down his father and scowled. That tail, his father’s freaking huge-ass tail, that’s what got him last time! Not this time, not again.

He charged, he jumped, he dodged, stumbled a bit, but quickly recovered in time to doge a punch. Was his father moving slower this time? Impossible, Mycaelis must have been moving faster. His father would never let him gain the upper hand. Another blow was coming, a jet of flame from his mouth forced it back. There was a gap, he went for it. Slice! A small scratch on his father’s flesh; excellent! More of those would be needed; many, many more.

“Power, Son! Power!” He heard his father bellow, not satisfied enough with his tiny injury. “Speed and power, speed and power! You’re a beast! Act like it!”

Gaius, his father, was a giant colossus that knew no such thing as mortality. Mycaelis on the other hand was but an insect with nothing

except weakness to support his desire for greater strength. He jumped at his father attempting to slash at his snout, but was caught by a giant hand and slammed against a tree. He was kept pinned there while his father glared at him.

“Maybe you’re just tired, eh?” His father grinned and squeezed tighter. “This session isn’t even over, and you’re already tired?! Only whelps tire, only whelps know weakness! Are you a whelp, Mycaelis!? Or are you more like Vagus... that Totodile you call brother?”

The words cut like knives. He wasn’t tired, he was just getting started. He wasn’t allowed to be tired, he wasn’t allowed to be weak or make mistakes. He was, as his father said, a son of Ladon; a descendant of the great serpent, the one who demanded the best from those that carried his power within them. He demanded the best from the best, and Mycaelis was eager to show his father that he was the best of those best, and that he and Ladon had a son they could both be proud of.

Mycaelis glared at his father with a venomous stare, one that projected hatred in the purist of forms. Like a rabid animal Mycaelis scowled and flailed against the force of his father’s pinning hand, kicking, scratching, biting whatever part of it he could reach. The iron hand remained unmoved, leaving Mycaelis efforts rewarded with nothing but a menacing chuckle from his father.

Hate, anger, rage; it built up inside the Charmander, pushing aside his sanity, his ability to reason, leaving him with only a desire to burn, crush and destroy. Only his enemies’ screams of pain and terror could feed the creature he was becoming. The source of his hatred was not his father, nor was it his purpose in life, or the training he endured, it was hatred of weakness; his own weakness.

He wasn’t weak! He wasn’t! Couldn’t be! Not an option! Mycaelis roared and what followed next made even his father shudder. The Charmander’s eye glowed a brilliant white; the flame on his tail doubled in size and turned a hot blue. The trunk of the tree at his

back burst into flames as Mycaelis' body turned hot as molten lead. In almost the blink of an eye a storm of fire exploded from the Charmander, engulfing all around it.

The fiery blast hit with the force of a charging Rhyhorn, sending his father stumbling back with flames tearing at his body. The Feraligatr scowled, falling back onto the ground and withering around in an effort to extinguish the flames. As the echo of Mycaelis' roar faded deeper into the jungle, Gaius quickly clambered to his feet. Mycaelis' Overheat had left a wide crater of smouldering trees and small spot fires in its wake. The scent of smouldering jungle was thick in the air as Gaius loomed over his son once more.

Mycaelis had fallen from the charcoaled tree trunk was kneeling before his father. Violent shakes had taken hold of his body, symptoms of dire exhaustion accompanied by deep and raspy breaths. He had done it! He had beaten his father back! Only one last thing remained. Summoning what was sure to be the last of his strength, Mycaelis looked up at his father. The sight he beheld made him sigh, collapse and slip into his waking dreams. His father had smiled.

With a proud chuckle Gaius knelt before the unconscious Charmander and placed a hand against his head. "Well done, my son."

The thought of possibly killing Mycaelis today did not once seep into his mind. It never did. Mycaelis' death in the midst of his training would mean only one thing; he was unfit to be his son. Gaius was, none the less, elated by his son's receptiveness to indoctrination. He was proud of the monster he was creating, proud of fathering such a marvellous creation.

And so, Gaius took the monster of his creation into his arms and carried its limp form through the jungle. Home, they were bound for. A night's worth of rest so that another day of indoctrination and soul purging could take place. After all, a soul was no more than a

sickness; an obstacle on the path to greater strength, one that Gaius would do all he could to purge from his own child.

Expectations

Chapter 2: Expectations



There was always something new to be learnt here in this makeshift hovel that lay deep within this forsaken jungle. Many would say that life for Vagus the Totodile was not good enough for him, but it was his father who would say that it was Vagus who was not good enough for life. His father; the one he who ruled as king of Vagus' small world

had declared him useless and thus he conceded that he was indeed so.

Life had no room for weakness and weakness was all that Vagus had to offer. Vagus had seen firsthand what happened to those who were weak, the creatures of this jungle that were foolish enough to challenge his father. A Salamence, despite boasting the attributes of a freak of nature, lay torn to pieces in a nearby clearing. A pair of Rhydon, who attempted to intrude upon his father, lay with their rock like chests shattered and insides strewn on the ground. In the very hut which he sat, the skulls of an Aggron, a Haxorus, a Dragonite and several Tyranitar adorned the walls, infinite reminders to Vagus that the world he lived in had no room for weakness.

While his brother toiled under the savagery of his father's training, Vagus remained here in his home, or at least that's what he had been taught all his life to call this hovel with its leaky thatched roof, creepy skulls and mossy stone walls. His eyes, his two emerald green eyes, began to wonder and trace the cracks in ever dull stone that glowed in the dim light of the candles that surrounded him.

"Focus now, Vagus." A silk-smooth voice that always helped him find a sense of inner meaning came from behind.

He was not alone in this desolated hut, he never really was. An orange clawed hand came to rest on his shoulder, prompting him to look down again at the crude desk upon which lay several pages of parchment with odd looking runes scrawled across them.

"Mum, please. I need to see the reference again. I can't read these without it."

Divina, a slender and elegant Charizard came to kneel at his side. If Vagus' father was a prime specimen that demonstrated brute strength, then his mother was a specimen that demonstrated a deadly mixture of beauty, intellect as well as strength. Vagus knew that some of the skulls in this hut were placed there by her. But it was raw strength that this jungle recognised and thus his father still ruled

as the king of Vagus' tiny world, even if his mother were to claim a pile of skulls more than him.

"Vagus," She gazed at him with pair of emerald green eyes of her own, "While your father may loath your ability to tear apart foes, I don't doubt what you have in here," She prodded his head. "You know you can read them. Remember what you learned yesterday about-"

"It's not exactly helping when I have to sit here for hours staring at the same pages, you know?"

"Then stop staring and start seeing."

Vagus grunted and exhaled, doing what he could to push aside his frustration and to make sense of the runes before him. The "words", as his mother called it, of the Unown perplexed him, yet mystified him to the point of intrigue. They were words, letters of words, that not even his father could make sense of. They were something that not even he, the self-proclaimed ruler of Vagus' small world, could grasp the meaning of. It was here in these tattered pages before him that his father was weak and he was strong and that it was his mother that gave him every ounce of his strength.

Vagus peered onto the pages and took his mother's words to heart. He did more than just stare, he saw and when he saw, he remembered. The words seemed to dance in his mind, the letters becoming words that he could make sense of. Some things seemed familiar, others not so much, but soon he was able to piece them together one at a time before the runes on the paper became words he could speak. He had done it.

"They are Ladon's finest warriors, those who devote themselves to him. Forged in the fires of battle, they are the bulwark against chaos. They are the Laconians, the warriors without equal."

Vagus grinned when he finished reading the words out loud. He recognised the phrase, it was one that he had heard many times

before. He turned to his mother with a smile, both proud of his efforts and surprised by what they yielded.

"This quote, it's the same one from those stories you and dad tell us?"

"Yes. I know how much you enjoy them, especially Mycaelis." Usually Divinia's face was almost always expressionless, her voice monotone and her eyes unflinching. It didn't take much for Vagus to notice a slight and proud grin appearing at the corner of her mouth.

The pieces of the puzzle in Vagus' head clicked into place and he realised that she had chosen something he would easily recognise.

"What happened to the Laconians? If they were all so tough like you and dad, then why are we the last of them? There aren't any more around, maybe hiding in this jungle like us?"

Divina shook her head. "I'm afraid not, Vagus. We and these stories are all that remain. And as for what happened to them-" The remaining words stopped dead in her mouth.

Vagus was almost cringing in anticipation to hear her tell him. He gazed at his mother, a usually focused and sharp minded female who now stared into space, her mouth gaped and eyes droopy like those of an idiot.

"Mum..." He noticed her twitch slightly when he spoke. She turned to him with what he knew was a forced smile.

"That is a story for another time. Perhaps when you are older."

"Oh? Well... maybe I can read stuff from that book that you always write in. I mean, you always write in Unown. What do you even write in that book. Is it a journal or something?"

A mixture of apprehension and agitation flooded Divina's eyes. The book in question, a small leather covered tome with symbol matching the one on their armbands, lay on the desk beside the papers. Like

lightning from the night sky, Divina's claw slammed down on it and pulled it away from Vagus' curious eyes. Her voice went cold and sent a chill down Vagus' spine.

"Vagus... listen to me very clearly. You are not to touch this book. Ever! I find you reading from it, I will not be responsible for what your father will do to you. Do you understand?"

Vagus felt his heart sink and before he could protest against his mother's decree, the door to their small hut was thrown open, its rusty makeshift hinges groaning in protest as a brute lumbered through the threshold of the doorway. Vagus felt his heart sink even further and whatever pride of his accomplishments remained soon vanished at the sight of his father entering the house.

Gaius quickly slammed the door shut with the same brutish force he had used to open it. In his free arm he cradled an unconscious Charmander, a youth who Vagus knew as his brother. Vagus felt the iron weight of his father's imposing gaze descend upon him. He felt it as though the weight of the ocean were bearing down upon him whenever his father looked upon him, rendering judgment at the most instant of glances and undermining any attempts to make himself appear slightly less pathetic.

Something appeared unusual about his father as he lumbered into the hovel. Perhaps it was the small collation of scratches he had acquired, or the small patches of singed flesh, or layers of soot... or maybe it was the grin that was forming at the side of his mouth. His mother had also noticed it, she had noticed them all as he had, but only she was allowed to comment on it.

"Well now," Divina strode towards her mate and caressed his bulky arms, examining his wounds. "Seems like someone got their butt kicked today, hm?"

Gaius responded with a chuckle. "Not so sure if I'll consider it a butt kicking, but this strong one is definitely full of surprises."

Divina turned her attention to Mycaelis who lay tucked away asleep in his father's arm and regarded both him and his father with a disapproving glance. "You don't think you're pushing him too hard? You bring him home in this state every afternoon."

"Nonsense," Gaius waved a hand in dismissal and strode past her and Vagus.

Vagus remained silent, his father seemed to like pretending that he didn't exist and Vagus was all the more happy to play that game. It kept him away from his father's scorn, his judgments and his expectations. He watched as Gaius set Mycaelis down on his bed of dried leaves and vines taken from the jungle. He watched from afar as Gaius caressed his son's head and smiled upon him as he slept.

"Look at him, Divina," Gaius beamed when he turned to his mate. "Are we not blessed with the strongest of sons? I'll make him the strongest Laconian to have ever lived, stronger than those in the stories of old, stronger than the both of us combined. Our son will be a legend in his own right."

"With ambitions like that, I fear he'll be a dead son before long. Were we still in the place of old, the Ephors would have you reprimanded for pushing him to such extremes."

"Yes, but we're not, are we?" Gaius turned to her with the expression of an excited school boy, a very large and menacing school boy. "This is our chance, a chance to create a warrior the likes of which Laconia has never seen! My son, our son, will be that warrior!"

Vagus could never make any sense of some of the words. Ephors, Place of Old, Laconia. Such things were beyond Vagus' comprehension, it were as though his parents were speaking in code, hoping to keep him oblivious to things. The secrecy irritated him at times, but he respected it and tried as hard as possible to not ask questions.

Divina in the meantime had busied herself dipping a wet cloth into a bowl of water. She then approached Gaius and began to wipe away the soot from his arms.

"Mycaelis is indeed strong, perhaps even stronger than most of our kind." She worked the cloth up to his oversized snout and dabbed a small scratch left by Mycaelis. 'But those who walk the path to greater strength are subject to folly, Gaius. Ensure you don't accidentally birth a monster instead of a warrior.' She nuzzled his snout.

"What would you have me do, Divina? Have him sit at that desk and force him to stare at blotchy symbols that will serve him no purpose in his life. Such is an occupation reserved for cripples..." his gaze shifted over to Vagus, "... and weaklings."

"Oh?" Divina was quick to bring herself between the two and break Gaius gaze. "And me? Am I a cripple or weakling?"

At this Gaius simply smiled and caressed her cheek. "You are amongst our kind's most gifted, a master of many talents and skills," his gaze soon found its way back to Vagus. "It's a pity that some of us are born without any."

Usually his mother would protest against his comments and would argue for Gaius to give Vagus a chance, just a fleeting moment to demonstrate what he could do, that there was use for him, that he could live up to a small limit of expectations, and that he was good enough to justify his existence. But now, it seemed that after all these years she had started giving up. Vagus didn't blame her; he imagined that a more meaningful conversation could take place with a solid stone wall. Instead his mother fell silent for a moment and said something that surprised he, and his father, both; "They've arranged a meeting."

Gaius, as equally confused as Vagus, furrowed his brow, mystified by the sudden turn in the conversation. "Meeting? Who?"

His mother regarded Vagus with a nervous glance before dropping her tone to a near whisper. Despite her change in tone, Vagus could still hear the words that came from her mouth. "Our contact. They report we should meet at dusk."

"Ah," Gaius eyes drifted down to Mycaelis who rested on the bed. "I can't go. Not until Mycaelis wakes up. Wouldn't be right to not be here when he awakens. His injuries need tending to."

"I know, but they've requested that you come personally. Our presence has caused quite a stir in this jungle. We can't make it more difficult."

Gaius growled in annoyance. "You're right."

"He'll understand," assured Divina.

Vagus winced as his father's expression turned vicious. It was terrifying sight to behold and was the last thing that many others saw before dying an agonising death at his claws. He turned to Vagus. "Come here, boy!"

Like an obedient servant Vagus strode forth. "Yes, Sir?" His father hated it when he, Vagus specifically, addressed him as dad or father. The use of *Sir* seemed to placate his father.

"You will treat Mycaelis' injuries to the best of your limited abilities. You will tend to his needs when he awakens and inform him we will return after dusk. Is this understood?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Good!" He then turned to Divina. "Let's go."

Before they could even reach the door, Vagus allowed his curiosity to get the better of him and asked question that would usually contain a swift swipe across the face by his father's hand as a response.

"Where are you off to?"

His father froze and looked back at him. He must have been in a hurry; else he would have given such a response then and there. Instead he simply grumbled. "It's not of your concern."

"Or Mycaelis'." Added Divina as she opened the door and urged her mate to continue onwards. "We'll be back soon."

And so Vagus the Totodile was left alone there in that hut, charged with the duty of caring for his father's dream, the dream of creating the strongest warrior the world would ever know. Mycaelis was more than just his son, more than just a monster of his creation; he was Gaius dream, his life's work.

And Vagus? Vagus was but one of many jigsaw pieces in bringing Gaius vision of a perfect warrior into reality. This was the limit of his father's expectations of him in this small world in this desolate jungle. Vagus however did take solace in the fact that failure was impossible. He already knew he couldn't become more of a failure than what his father already saw him as.

Brothers

Chapter 3: Brothers



There was a certain joy for Vagus when he was left home alone. Although being strictly forbidden from moving any further than the meagre boundaries set around the small house, Vagus was able to feel a sense of freedom.

The borders of his small world may have not stretched far and wide, but they seemed to stretch a lot further whenever his parents were absent. His shoulders felt lighter now the burden of his father's disapproving gaze had left him, and his arms seemed more mobile without his mother's chains of iron discipline. For this short while, he was free, or at least as free as he would ever hope to be.

Vagus turned to his brother, Mycaelis, who sat perched on a nearby rock. The young Charmander was making a freakishly fast recovery since his awakening some hours ago. His more severe cuts had been covered and bruises lathered with ointment. Mycaelis had torn most, if not all, of the makeshift bandaging from his body; his pride simply didn't allow it to be present even if it meant Vagus receiving the inevitable blame for not treating his wounds properly. He had at least heeded Vagus' advice to take the air outside; it often got stuffy in the small hovel.

Vagus approached his brother as he sat upon the smooth moss lathered rock. "Ya need anything?"

Like a serving attendee, the Totodile remained standing by the side of the rock on which Mycaelis sat, waiting... waiting and wondering when the silent Charmander would answer. Mycaelis turned his head and gave his response in the form of a smile. He scooted over, allowing Vagus some room on his rock. "Come."

Vagus shrugged and took the seat he was offered and felt Mycaelis hand slap down on his shoulder. "Mate, why don't you go get yourself something?"

Vagus retorted with puzzled expression. "Me? Hey, dad says I gotta make sure you get better."

"Exactly!" snapped Mycaelis, "You're always letting him treat ya like some slave. What ya need to go and get yourself, Vagus, is a pair of fuckin balls and stand up to him."

Vagus scoffed and retorted with scowl. "Not this again, Mycaelis!"

They had had this conversation many times, almost always whenever they were alone. Their father would have forbid them from talking at all had he been present. Mycaelis had spoken the same words so often that Vagus was beginning to suspect he was being condescending, even though he wasn't.

“Yes, this again, ya dopey cunt.” Mycaelis paused to cough for a moment. “Dad respects strength and only strength. Ya need to show him that ya got shit tons of it. If ya got nuthin’, then yer worth nothing! Law of the jungle!”

Vagus paused and remained silent. “Law of the jungle” as it was called. Where the strongest were allowed to live and the weakest were left to die at the hands of whatever fate they were too pathetic to avoid or prevent. Vagus knew that were it not for his older brother, or father, he would have met with such a fate numerous times over during his short lifetime.

“Yea...” Vagus groaned, tilting his head down, “law of the jungle.” His father may have ruled as king of Vagus’ small world, but it was this law that ultimately shaped it and declared his father to be its rightful ruler.

And Mycaelis? Mycaelis, provided he didn’t succumb to disease of weakness, would be Gaius’ successor, not Vagus. The law had declared that Vagus was too weak to rule his own life as it would only lead him to an early grave if he tried to; he needed a liege lord’s protection more than anyone.

“How can I?” asked Vagus, frustrated. “He won’t take me seriously. Heck, he won’t even train me because I’m so pathetic in his eyes.”

Vagus shrugged his brother’s hand off his shoulder and jumped to his feet. “You’ve heard what he says about me! That training me would be a death sentence. That I’m so frail... that he’ll kill me or worse if he even tried.”

“Aye,” agreed Mycaelis. “And how he says that he’s slain hundreds, but murdered none and that yer death in training would be his first?”

Vagus sighed, feeling slightly put down at being reminded of his father’s words. Even without him present, his words were still there to remind him of how pathetic he was.

“Vagus,” Mycaelis regarded his brother with a comforting gaze. “Dad cares about us. He doesn’t do a good job of showing it like mum does, but trust me, he does.” He presented to Vagus one of his latest scars, a deep one that slid down the back of his head from where he had banged it against the trunk of the tree.

“See that? Every cut, every bruise he gives me in every session, he gives to make me stronger. Look around ya, mate. This place is fulla cunts that’ll butcher us without thinking twice. Thanks to dad, anything that has tried to hurt us has ended up as a skull on the wall. He wants to help make us strong, so that we can protect each other and start putting up skulls on that wall too.”

Vagus cringed inside. He knew how much his brother loved him, and that he truly meant well by the words he spoke, but Vagus also knew that the words rang hollow. Words were a part of Mycaelis indoctrination, too and his father had done all he could to delude him into thinking his training and agony were for his own good.

Mycaelis was completely oblivious to what his father’s true intentions were, and that he was being groomed to become the next monster that this jungle would come to fear. He was simply an extension of his father’s bloody legacy. Vagus had known his father all his life, and not once had he known him for doing something for someone else’s sake.

Vagus didn’t argue against the hollow yet meaningful words, he didn’t tell Mycaelis that he was wrong, that it was only he that his father cared about, that he was simply the product of madman’s dream to create the perfect warrior. Mycaelis had become so deluded by his father’s teachings that he was beyond the reach of reason, or at least whatever reason Vagus could present him with. Vagus had long ago accepted this and simply tried to support the brother that cared about him; tending to his wounds when he was injured, sneaking him food when he was starved, or keeping him company when he felt alone.

Mycaelis may have been stronger and more loved by his parents than Vagus would have ever hoped to be, but Vagus did not look upon his

brother with envy; instead he looked upon him with pity. Vagus never saw a monster in Mycaelis, he always saw a friend whenever he turned to him; someone that was also stuck in this tiny world, someone that did all he could to remind Vagus that he meant something to someone. But for how long would that brother of his remain until the monster growing within him took over?

“I’m beyond help, Mycaelis.” For the first time, Vagus had finally admitted it, he had known it for years, but had never openly admitted it to anyone. “Both mum and dad have realised it. Maybe it’s time you do as well.”

Mycaelis chuckled. “No yer ain’t.”

A rare wave of rage overcame Vagus. He was sick of being told things that weren’t true, he was sick of hearing the words that came from his brainwashed brother.

“Look at me!” Vagus snapped and stood over Mycaelis. “Do I look like anything out of mum and dad’s stories? Do I look like one of the heroes that slaughtered monsters by the hundreds and saved innocents by the thousands? I’m not A Laconian, you are! Me? I’m an accident!”

Absorbed by his rage, Vagus set his foot wrong and stumbled from the rock. He landed with a thud on his backside and grunted, annoyed by his overwhelming levels of clumsiness.

Without hint of a flaw in his graceful movements, Mycaelis jumped and silently landed at his brother’s side. He knelt and looked into his emerald green eyes. “No. That was an accident. You,” he prodded Vagus’ forehead, “on the other hand, are nothing like that.”

Mycaelis got to his feet and pulled Vagus to his. “There’s more to being a Laconian than just an armband.” He slapped him on the shoulder. “And ya wanna know why that is?”

“Not really, but you’re gonna tell me anyway.”

“Aye, you’re bloody well right I will!” He crossed his arms. “Blood is what makes a Laconian, and whether Dad likes it or not, yer me brother and ya always will be. Ya have my blood and I got yours, I am Laconian and that means you are too, and ya will be till the day ya die.”

To Vagus the words no longer seemed hollow; this certainly wasn’t one of his father’s ideas that had imprinted themselves in Mycaelis’ mind. The hulking Feraligatr always preferred to not acknowledge Vagus as having blood ties with Mycaelis, his favoured son. For the first time in what seemed a while, Vagus listened to genuine words come from his brothers mouth.

“Dad might have lost faith in ya, but I sure as hell haven’t. There’s a Laconian inside ya, Vagus. I’m gonna bring it out in ya and I don’t give a shit what dad thinks. If there’s one thing I’ve come to hate about this place, its weakness and you’re full of it. I’m gonna burn every last ounce of it out of you, no matter what it takes. I’m gonna succeed where dad has failed.”

Laconians, those heroic figures from stories that Vagus knew only as myth. The figures like his mother, his father and own brother, whom he had always wanted to be one of, yet was told he would never be. For years in this jungle he had resigned himself to the fact that he would never be one, but it always seemed his father had trouble extinguishing the fires of desire and hope within Vagus. It seemed now that Mycaelis was prepared to answer his hopes and dreams.

Mycaelis had hooked Vagus’ interests and suddenly the Totodile had forgotten all he had ever thought about his brother’s training: The creation of a monster, the indoctrinating of abhorrent ideals of strength, the purging of one’s soul. He didn’t care, he was sick to death of being an invalid. If being a Laconian meant being a valued member of this family, then a Laconian he would become.

“You...” Vagus stuttered, hardly believing what Mycaelis was proposing. “You think I can be one?”

“Think?” Mycaelis snorted. “I know ya can be one. Being strong is the only thing that matters in life. Being strong means no one messes with ya. It means you get to live.”

His words where true. Under this jungle canopy, strength was all that mattered, for it was the only trait that Vagus’ small world would ever recognise. He would get to live.

He regarded his brother with a smile. “Promise?”

“Aye, I promise. We’ll both be sons that dad can be proud of.” Mycaelis returned the smile and placed an arm around Vagus shoulder. “You and me, bro.”

The thought of being his brother’s equal made Vagus smile even more, but even if Mycaelis succeeded in surpassing him, he wouldn’t mind. If there was anyone in this small world that Vagus would rather place himself beneath, it would be his own brother; the only person in this forsaken place that he could truly call a friend.

Visitors

Chapter 4: Visitors



Left, right, right, left, left right. The amount of movement involved in this exercised perplexed Vagus to no end. His father was a colossal brute, the sort of fighter who would have powered his way through a foe's meagre defences to literally tear them limb from limb. But the way in which Mycaelis had been trained to move was something else entirely.

The Charmander moved with such grace, precision and speed that he was almost an orange blur before Vagus' eyes. Vagus' legs simply couldn't move him fast enough. The only purpose they seemed to

serve was keeping his body upright while Mycaelis pummelled him in an endless stream of bone shaking strikes.

Vagus' legs finally gave way, allowing Mycaelis to deliver a swift kick to the bottom of his jaw and flipping him falling onto his back. Vagus tasted a hint of copper in his mouth and grunted. They had been at this for many hours now.

"See," Mycaelis grinned, standing over him. 'You are Laconian. Dad reckons anyone else wouldn't be able to move by now."

Vagus, despite the pummelling he was getting, he was able to feel Mycaelis' words stir a sense of pride within him as he rose to his feet. He was groggy and his joints hurt like hell, but he was still standing.

"Well, at least I'm able live up to part of the legend." Vagus grunted, spitting a speck of blood from his mouth.

"Aye, ya can indeed. But from what Dad says, Laconians can dish out as much damage as they can take."

'Dad says this, Dad says that', all he had heard from Mycaelis' gob were words linked to his father. Just how deeply did Gaius sink his teachings into Mycaelis' mind? Vagus could be forgiven for thinking that it was his father he was sparring with rather than his brother. But then again, he knew he would be dead several times over if it was truly sparing with the colossus that was his father.

Vagus then asked the question he should have asked several hours ago; when his brother promised him that he would be a son that his father could be proud of.

"Mycaelis," he said panting, recovering his breath. "How... how exactly do you plan to get Dad to recognise my strength?"

"Well, duh. By beating the crap outa me, of course. You gotta show that we're both on equal ground. Even if I am slightly older than ya."

An inconvincible horror overcame Vagus, one that transcended the fear of being continually beaten into the dirt by his loving brother. Mycaelis was the embodiment of his father's legacy, his vision of a perfect warrior, his desire to create a legend of his own, he was the embodiment of his pride and ego... an ego that towered above the greatest trees of this jungle, an ego that was so monolithic in size that none could challenge it.

Vagus was being asked to beat the crap out of it.

He took a deep breath before responding. "Mycaelis... I can't do that."

"Well, of course ya can't. Not yet, but you-"

"You don't understand! It's not that I can't, it's that I'm not supposed to be able to beat you!"

Mycaelis regarded his brother with an inquisitive frown. "What ya mean?"

"Don't you get it? You're Dad's golden boy! Do you have any idea what he'll do to me when I undermine everything he's done to make you who you are? When... if I ever beat the crap out of ya, he'll... he'll..." He shuddered, the skulls mounted on the walls of their hut flashing before his eyes.

Vagus believed that his father's ego was so colossal, that it defied reality. He was king of this world, master of this universe, everything went the way he planned it to go, everything occurred as though it were an extension of his will, anything that went against him, simply didn't occur. He simply didn't allow it to occur and when it did, he quietly dealt with it and denied the fact that it ever occurred.

Even if Vagus, by some miracle, became stronger than Mycaelis, his father would simply deal with him and deny that Mycaelis' defeat ever occurred. A whole stream of excuses would cover it up. Mycaelis was ill on the day, the sun was in his eyes, or he was already injured from a training session. It didn't matter; his father would come up with

some reasoning that implied that Vagus had an unfair advantage. The whole thing will be forgotten and life would continue as normal with the exception of Vagus being eternally absent from it.

Vagus stared at his brother in silence. It was clear from Mycaelis vacant expression that he was at a loss for words, or was searching very hard for some to say. For once, just once, his brother was left without an answer to give. His indoctrinated mind wasn't built to think of himself as a golden boy.

An answer came eventually, it was on the tip of Mycaelis tongue, before he could respond, Vagus felt something clamp down from behind on his shoulder.

"Excuse me?" came a voice.

It was a female's, a well-spoken female voice. But the most startling thing about it was the fact that Vagus had never heard it before. Throughout his entire life most of the voices he heard were those of his family and the roars of the jungle's many miscreants.

"Who are you?" snapped Mycaelis rushing towards Vagus and pulling him away from her touch.

It was then Vagus was able to look up at this new arrival. His eyes widened at the sight of her. She too was towering figure, almost as big as Divina, but still smaller than his father. No one was bigger than his father.

"Better yet," said Vagus. "What are you...?" He had never seen such a creature before in his life. She was a hunched creature with a giant spike laden shell upon her back from which her head and a pair of thick arms protruded from. A pair of thick legs supported the mass of her upright body.

"Goodness. You have never seen the likes of a Chestnaught in these parts?" The creature, the Chestnaught, surveyed both Mycaelis and Vagus with a pair of inquisitive eyes. "I am seeking Commander Gaius. I take it that you are his sons?"

“C-commander?” Mycaelis scratched the back of his head.

She turned to Mycaelis and seemingly recalled something from the depths of her mind. “Ah, yes. Little Mycaelis.” She beamed brightly. “It is good to see you are growing well.” She then turned to Vagus with one of the brightest smiles he had ever seen. “And oh my, a Totodile? So Gaius finally got one for a son. He must be so proud!”

Vagus had always been told by his mother that he was born with a sharp mind, but never before had it ever felt so blunt and confused as now. He turned to Mycaelis astonished at the Chestnuaght’s recognition of him and saw equal confusion etched on his face. Mycaelis had never seen her before in his life, nor had Vagus.

“W... what do you mean...?” Mycaelis stuttered.

Before a response could be given a call came from the depths of the jungle. A voice that was familiar to him, that of his own mother. “Artemis?”

She came from the brush amongst the jungle’s trees and beheld a sight that made Vagus’ heart skip a beat. She was covered in blood. Lots of it, none of which Vagus assessed to be hers. She appeared almost exhausted and even her voice sounded hoarse. His father, like a bulldozer clearing scrubland, lumbered through the foliage behind her. He too was covered in blood, not his own either.

Both his parents regarded the new arrival with surprise. Shock or horror would have been the more correct words for it, but Vagus never knew his parents were capable of even feeling such an emotion as shock let alone horror. The Chestnaught, named Artemis turned to address their parents, revealing something that made both Mycaelis and Vagus eye’s budge. An armband, black as the night sky and identical to that of their father’s was wrapped tightly around her left arm.

“A Laconian?” whispered Vagus to Mycaelis.

Vagus' head began to spin as his mind attacked everything he was raised to believe. That they were the last. That there were no others. Questions came faster than he could reason with them. He wanted to know. He wanted to know everything.

Artemis regarded Vagus' parents with a stern gaze. "Divina. Gaius." She surveyed their blood splattered bodies with her bright smile. "Glad to see you're making the most of your long term vacation. I've lost count of how many summers it's been now."

Gaius crossed his arms and growled. He seemed as tired as Divina was. Vagus could tell that he had not anticipated someone to intrude upon his world where he reigned as king. He was writhe with self-contained fury, like a bottle ready to burst its cork. "You better start talking, Artemis. We're not having a good afternoon."

Gaius seemed as though he was using every effort he could muster to keep his manner as polite as possible, even in his enraged state. Whoever this Laconian was, she seemed to demand a certain degree of respect.

It was then Divina turned to him. "Can we at least take this inside?" She nodded towards Vagus and Mycaelis, trying to subtly indicate to Gaius that his sons were within earshot of the conversation.

Gaius nodded in agreement and silently lumbered into the hovel with Artemis following close.

"Mum," Vagus piped up. A hundred or so questions rushed forward, but the one that reached his tongue first was one that seemed to sum them all up. "What the heck is going on?"

"Things, Vagus." She seemed tired, very tired. "Many things."

Frustrated, he wanted to yell at her for being so vague, but Mycaelis beat him to it. "What fuckin' things?"

She sighed. "I will explain it to you in due course. For now... I need you two to keep an eye on things out here. Keep each other close."

Alert us if there's anyone here."

Without further word she turned and entered the hovel, pulling the door closed as she went. It didn't take much for Vagus to realise that something had gone very wrong and that matters were about to only grow worse.

For a while both he and Mycaelis did as they were instructed. They stood outside the house, both on opposing sides of the door, standing with their arms crossed like a pair of the world's smallest nightclub bouncers, ready to knock the crap out of anyone who they didn't like the look of.

More time passed in complete silence. Night had completely fallen and the jungle was pitch black. Only the warm glow of torches staked into the ground providing any illumination. There was no moon, and the torches themselves did a poor job of illuminating the jungle.

Vagus knew that their hovel was only supposed to be a hidden refuge, not a blazing well lit fortress that challenged all around it test their mettle. But what it was that this refuge was hidden from, he could only guess. Was it the criminals and outlaws that roamed the jungle, or perhaps groups of miscreants from the outside world? He had seen his father deal with dozens of those.

Now it seemed that there was a threat in this jungle that went beyond those of his reckoning, something that had managed to exhaust both his mother and father and strike hints of uncertainty into their hearts. He wanted answers and he wanted them now.

Fed up with the long and endless wait, he crept closer to the door and placed his head against it, wanting to hear what he could of the conversation inside.

"The heck are you doing?" Mycaelis snapped under his breath.

"What does it look like?" Vagus responded with a whisper. "Shut up."

Mycaelis crossed his arms and snarled. He turned his attention back to the jungle behind him, obeying his mother's order. Years of discipline and indoctrination had worked wonders for Mycaelis. His mind had been constructed to obey every last law and rule his parents had lain down without question. How he would respond to anyone else's laws or rules Vagus could only guess. He knew Mycaelis was already risking a fair bit trying to train him.

Vagus listened to the ensuing conversation on the other side of the door and cursed himself for not listening in sooner. He could make very little sense of what he heard. Nonetheless, he continued to listen and when he listened, he learned.

"So they are here, then?" he heard Artemis. Her voice lacked its formality. A hint of fear seemed to have crept into it. "You can confirm this?"

"After what we just survived. Yes." Divina's voice was firm. "I've documented the rest of the proof in this journal, here."

"They're getting stronger." Gaius rumbled. "For the past decade or so we've been following nothing but crumbs, but now..."

Artemis sighed. "Then it is time for you to leave, for both your sakes and those of your sons. Bring this news before the assembly. I'm sure you both will be commended."

"The child of the Blossom Garden is still missing," Gaius snarled. "Our work here isn't finished. We know where he's being held, all we have to do is--"

"That objective was secondary and purely a formality. The situation back home is precarious enough as it is. All is about to go to ruin. We need you, Gaius."

Artemis almost sounded like she was pleading with him, almost begging. It was then she uttered a sentence that sent shivers down Vagus' spine. She dropped the name of place that he believed was only the stuff of myth and legend.

She pleaded again. "Please, Gaius. Return to Elysium."

Shadows

Chapter 5: Shadows

"They were attacked," whispered Vagus, looking over his shoulder at Mycaelis.

The Charmander snorted. "It's Prismatic Jungle, Vagus. Everyone gets attacked."

Frustration began to creep into Vagus' nerves. He had long grown used to Mycaelis' ignorance. He had lived with it for so long it seemed as though Mycaelis was simply born ignorant. But now Vagus was reaching the end of his tether.

"You don't understand," Vagus held back the urge to yell, knowing it would alert his parents. "There is something out there hunting them. Hunting us."

Mycaelis grinned. "Let 'em come. Been a while since I last saw Mum and Dad spill some guts."

"They barely escaped with their lives. Didn't you see how exhausted they were?"

"Nope," he turned away. "Now, how 'bout you shut yer gob and look this way. Like you're supposed to be doing."

Vagus sighed, conceding once again that he had been defeated by the stone wall that was Mycaelis' ignorance. He didn't bother; more talking would only attract his parent's attention. He resumed his place, standing on the opposite of the door next to Mycaelis and gazed out into the blackness.

He then realised why Mycaelis insisted on keeping his gob shut. Vagus couldn't see a bloody thing, and he very much doubted that

Mycaelis could either. Sound was the only sense that they could rely on in the darkness.

Vagus suddenly came to hate the glowing torches; they made him feel exposed, vulnerable. They did little to illuminate the scrub, yet they lit up Mycaelis and himself like the rising sun. If something was hunting them, peering at them through the Jungle's trees and scrub, they would have no problem sighting the two siblings.

Soon his fears came to fruition. There was a crackle in the bushes.

Faster than the blink of an eye Mycaelis let loose his Flamethrower in the direction of the noise. Vagus' heart jumped within his chest as the jungle before them lit up in the wake of Mycaelis' fire. Then Vagus saw it. His rapidly beating heart seemed to stop dead in his chest. They were only there for a second, but completely apparent before his eyes.

Hundreds of them. Black and shadowy figures. Vagus could not tell what species of Pokémon they were. They appeared silhouette and without any physical presence. Like ghosts. Their eyes were what struck terror into his heart. Red and bulging, they were the only distinguishable part of the figures.

The flames of Mycaelis flamethrower danced in their irises. Soon, almost within the blink of an eye, they vanished, seemingly into thin air. Mycaelis' Flamethrower ceased and allowed the darkness to flood back. All was quiet and dark again once more. The silence held for moment longer.

"D-did you s-see?" Eventually Vagus found himself able to move his mouth.

"Yup."

Soon the silence was gone. Mycaelis saw to that when he bellowed at the top of his lungs. "We got movement out here!"

Within seconds the door was thrown open as Gaius, Divina followed closely by Artemis rushed out. Artemis struggled fitting her robust shell through the door. The three hulking adults surveyed the blackness that offered them nothing but silence.

“What did ya see, son?” Gaius placed a reassuring hand on Mycaelis’ shoulder.

“In the bushes, dad. Whole mob of ‘em. They... they just disappeared.”

Vagus heard Divina curse behind him.

Gaius rushed forward. “Show yerselves! Gutless cunts! Spotted by a pair of kids and scared off!” He roared into the blankness. Each insult following another. “Looks like what the histories say about ya is bullshit! Not even worth the parchment they were written on! Next time I see one, I’m gonna wipe my arse with it!”

“Gaius, be careful,” Divina followed him closely.

“Stay close, boys,” Artemis held both Vagus and Mycaelis close shielding them with her arms. A cackle of laughter rose from the darkness and Vagus felt like the blood had frozen in his veins.

It first started as one, but was joined by another, then another....then another... and yet another. Soon it became so numerous that a whole chorus of cackles filled the darkness. To Vagus, it was horrifying. Not only were there so many, but they were laughing... at his father. No one every laughed at his father, they either cried or begged or pleaded, they never laughed. What came next he saw only from the corner of his eye. Artemis must have seen it as well, else Vagus’ story would have ended here.

A Sneasel leapt from the darkness. Howling and arms thrashing wildly, it quickly descended onto Vagus. Quick as lightning, Artemis’ arm launched forth, caught the smaller Pokémon in her claw and slammed it into the ground with enough force to make it shake. The screaming creature fell instantly silent.

“Contact!” she snapped, and soon chaos ensued.

The jungle, their home, their world seemed to turn on them in an instant. The shadows gave birth to dozens of ‘mons. Sneasels, Weaviles, Aipoms, Mankies, Mawile and many more species roughly the same size as them, rushed forward from the shadows, their eyes burning crimson and jaws or claws flashing wildly.

“Let ‘em have it!” Gaius bellowed driving an Ice Punch into a leaping Weavile.

The frozen solid creature flew back with such force it shattered into dozens of pieces when it slammed into a tree trunk. Although the foes were innumerable, Gaius still towered over them. Most had to jump and leap at him in order to hit anything vital.

Two Mankies came next, their mouths frothing at the sides. They seemed starved, like they hadn’t eaten in an eternity and craved flesh so desperately that they were willing to batter their way past each other in order to get to the fresh meat. They leapt at Gaius and were quickly swept aside and crushed by the force of his Aqua Tail.

Divinia opened up with her Flamethrower, sweeping the sustained attack over her foes with deadly discipline. She sidestepped an attack from a chomping Mawile, gripped its head and snapped its neck with a firm twist of her firm arms.

“Get them inside!” she howled, managing a glance back at Artemis.

Divina roared, fighting tooth and claw to protect her sons. She truly was a Charizard in her prime. Flames danced around her blood splattered body while her enemies fell before her might. She swiped and clawed at them as they came. They descended upon her like raindrops from the sky and not once did they overwhelm her and not once did she falter. Her foes fell either roasted or cleaved in two, some left dying in pools of their own blood as their wounds overcame them. Before Vagus could see any more, he and his brother were

shoved inside the stone hovel by Artemis' arm that swept them in with the force of a tidal wave.

Mycaelis was screaming. "I'll kill 'em! Lemme help! Ya need us!"

He was fighting her strength with every ounce there was in his body, but to no avail. She seemingly had more strength in her arm than Mycaelis had in his entire body. She barely paid him any attention when she slammed the door shut on him.

"Bitch!" snapped Mycaelis.



He immediately tried to bust open the door. Using all the strength his body could muster, he rammed against the door. He hoped to break it open, but to no avail. It didn't take long to realise that Artemis had barred the door with something from the outside.

Mycaelis still screamed, throwing his body against the door. "Let us out! Bitch, I know you can hear me! Let me the fuck out of here! Mum,

tell her to let us out! Dad!"

Vagus was at his breaking point. Here they were. Under direct attack from heaven-knows-what and he was stuck in a cramped stone room with an indoctrinated idiot that thought he could handle the situation himself. He pitied Mycaelis, and tolerated his rashness, but there were times, especially such as this, where he simply could tolerate no more.

"Shut up!" roared Vagus. His brother instantly fell silent, not used to seeing him lose his temper so quickly. "Just shut up! For damn's sake just shut up!"

Neither sibling said a word for a moment, their focus briefly shifting to the sounds of the battle outside. Vagus panted, recovering from both his outburst the shock of what was occurring. 'This is a heavy weight fight. You go out there, it'll be the end of us both.'

"Those are a gutless prick's words!" Mycaelis spat. "Laconians don't hide!"

"And have you ever wondered why we're the last of them? Have you?"

Even though Artemis' arrival had made Vagus doubt that they were the last, it was still something he was willing to admit just to keep Mycaelis from charging out the door and getting himself killed.

Vagus continued. "And in case you haven't noticed, we have been hiding. For our entire lives we've been hiding and now they've found us."

"And who are they?"

"How the hell should I know? Mum and dad didn't tell us a damn thing and I didn't hear you asking them any questions."

Mycaelis snorted. "They're just 'mons from the jungle."

“They’re not just ‘mons from the jungle!”

Vagus had to make Mycaelis see reason. See that things were happening in this tiny world that defied his comprehension. His parents were meddling in things beyond the scope of his reasoning and he had to find out. He had to know about it all before it was too late.

Vagus was almost pleading with his brother. ‘Mycaelis, I know dad taught you what to think and how to think, but you need to open your mind. You need to ask these questions.’

“What questions?”

“What were those shadows in the jungle? When was the last time you saw any Sneasels or Weaviles around here? Why did their eyes glow red? Why were they frothing at the mouth? Why don’t they use any moves? Why did they just charge blindly at us, why, why, why, Mycaelis? It’s like they were possessed. You need to think.”

“What’s the point in asking questions I don’t know the answer to? It’s stupid!”

Vagus wanted to bash his head against the wall in frustration. “You’re supposed to find the answers. That’s the reason why you ask a question in the first place.”

Mycaelis said nothing and for a while longer there was silence again. Both siblings stared at each other. The sounds of battle outside were dying down. The screams of the attacking ‘mons weren’t as loud as before. It sounded like they were being pushed further back into the jungle.

“Vagus...” Mycaelis croaked. His eyes, usually full of fire and fury seemed empty. He asked his first question. “Do you think I’m strong enough?”

“Neither of us are.” Vagus managed to smile weakly. “But like ya said; we’ll be both be sons dad can be proud of.” He found himself uttering

the same words he had come to doubt. “One day... someday.”

Conclusions

Chapter 6: Conclusions

Death is something that is always thought of as silent. Dead men tell no tales, dead men make no noise; they remain silent as the grave. There are even those who are said to pass peacefully. For Mycaelis and Vagus, death was never silent. They had both killed as they lived in a world where one must kill or be killed themselves. Never once could either sibling recall an occasion where death had been silent.

Death is the screams of agony as flesh is torn from broken bones, the howls of pain when entrails are split upon the ground. The cries for mercy, the shrieks of horror, the gurgling sound of someone drowning in their blood. Then come the sounds of those that behold death's work. The screams of terror, the gasps of disbelief, the wailing of loved ones as they grieve for their loss.

As Mycaelis and Vagus sat silent in that hovel in the jungle, they could hear Death outside, and it was far from silent. The screams of those attacking monsters assailed their ears to no end. Most shrieked, others screamed and all growled in one way or another. The sound was truly horrifying and came coupled with the occasional thud as the broken corpses of these monsters were thrown against the thick stone walls of the hovel.

Without warning, the door before them erupted into flames as a stray fireball impacted with it. The dry timber fueled the flames that were quick to spread up to the dry thatched roof. Both siblings knew it wouldn't take long for it to bring the whole ceiling down on top of them. Vagus, however, thought fast. Ignoring Mycaelis panic driven barrage of curses and swears, he sprayed down the door with his Water Gun .

"Bloody close one, mate," sighed Mycaelis in relief.

Outside, they could hear Gavis barking orders to Divina who snapped orders back to Artemis, who seemed to take a delight in throwing in orders of her own. They seemed like actors in a play, well trained, well-rehearsed, and ready to play out their part like they had been doing it all their lives. Laconians were dangerous on their own, only a fool would question that, but it was when they fought together that they were truly deadly.

After what seemed like an hour, the horrifying and chaotic sounds of battle began to fade deeper and deeper into the jungle until not even Vagus' keen hearing could hear them. There was only the sound of silence.

"I think they're gone." Mycaelis was already ramming himself against the door, trying again to get out.

With the door structurally weakened by the fire, the charcoaled frame was quick to break. Vagus, also sensing the danger to be passed, helped his brother, ramming against the door until it collapsed into a smoldering black heap.

Both Mycaelis and Vagus were already well acquainted with the sound of death, but had yet to see it on any significant level. What lay outside the door beheld them that very experience. They saw Death.

The jungle before them was ablaze with fire, the smell of burning jungle was thick in the air. An orange blaze of light surrounded the two siblings as the world they knew, or once knew, burned before their very eyes. Embers danced like fireflies in what was once the cold night air. There was also the smell, a coppery scent of blood and gore had filled their nostrils and that is when they saw them; bodies.

Dozens upon dozens, upon dozens, perhaps even a hundred. As they walked onward the hundred became hundreds more. They lay lifeless, scattered about the desolated jungle floor, the soil of which had now become mud, soaked by the blood and squishy entrails of the fallen creatures. Both siblings beheld the sight with open gobs as though they were witnessing the aftermath of Armageddon. No words

could leave their mouths, even Mycaelis' vast vocabulary of profanities and swears was left befuddled by the destruction he beheld.

Vagus took a moment to examine the corpse of a Manky. His father had claimed this kill, for the creature's abdomen had been torn out by the unmistakably vicious and powerful claws of a Feraligatr. Gone was the blaring red menace that shone within the depths of its eyes. Looking at it now, it appeared deceptively innocent, so innocent that one would think it was the victim of a psychopath. All the fallen looked the same, their eyes hallow and devoid of the red glow that chilled Vagus to his very core.

The two siblings continued to walk in absolute silence among the dead, deeper into the jungle. Neither of them could bring themselves to breathe words to one another. The Jungle brush had turned to ashes, the trunks of the trees and canopy were alight with flames that continued to bathe the two brothers in a hellish glow. The mass of bodies continued onward and onward and onward...

Vagus' found his mind somewhere between the precipice of sleep and consciousness, he had no idea where he was walking, what he was doing. Was he following Mycaelis, or was it Mycaelis who was following him? He didn't know. One thing that he did know for certain, however, was that the mass trail of bodies and devastation before him would have to end at some point.

For Vagus, it ended sooner. Amongst the bodies, the flames, and the singed fallen branches of the jungle canopy, he felt his foot collide with something leathery and yet strangely familiar in texture. He stopped and when he stopped, Mycaelis also stopped. Vagus knelt and pushed aside the butchered corpse of a Sneasle and what he uncovered underneath brought tears of worry and fear to his eyes.

It was his mother's journal; her coveted, precious journal. The same journal which she had slammed her claw down upon and dragged away from Vagus' curious eyes earlier this very evening, declaring he must never look within. It was the book he would see his mother

writing in every day using Unown, a text that none other than she could properly read. Never once could Vagus ever recall her being separated from this journal for more than a second. Whatever secrets she guarded within were secrets she would have died to protect. It was knowing this that caused Vagus to be engulfed by a wave of fear. Her book was here, and she was not.

“Mum!” Vagus found his voice and cried out into the flaming jungle. “Mum! Where are you? Hello?”

‘Dad!’ Mycaelis piped up and wondered forth through the jungle ahead of Vagus. “Dad! Ya out there? Where are ya?”

Vagus hugged the journal close to his chest, embracing it as though it were the body of his own mother. He wanted to see her, he wanted to see her right now, this instant. Right now she was finishing off the last of those attackers, she would be walking back. She would soon to appear from behind a charcoaled tree trunk, ready to whoop Vagus’ butt for leaving the house when he wasn’t supposed to.

She never appeared.

Mycaelis was still calling out for his father, for their father. ‘Dad! Dad where are ya?’

Vagus summoned his strength and wiped away his tears. He ventured forth after his brother. His mother would have expected him to keep the idiot in line, even during a time like this. He caught up with him and discovered a look of concern that he never thought was possible for his brother to express.

Mycaelis was howling now, and Vagus knew that for possibly the first time, he was truly afraid.

“Dad!” He roared out into the ember strewn jungle. “Dad! We’re over here!” he screamed as loud as his young lungs would allow him.

What followed Mycaelis next call made Vagus knees almost buckle.

“M... Mycaelis...” rumbled a voice. Both brothers snapped around in the direction of the response.

Both Mycaelis and Vagus had now seen Death. They had seen a burning jungle strewn with the corpses of hundreds, but nothing in this small and hostile world could prepare them for the sight they beheld.

Against the trunk of a blackened and burned tree, Gaius leaned. His body was covered in blood once more, but this time, much to the horror of both Mycaelis and Vagus, they realised that most of it was his own. The hulking Feraligatr clenched a concealed wound to his left torso and regarded both his sons with the most vacant of expressions. It seemed as though his very soul and essence had been sucked from his body. Vagus also took note of something quiet startling, his father’s black armband was missing, perhaps torn off in the midst of battle?

Both siblings watched on as their father took one step towards them, followed by a second and a third, allowing a grunt to escape his jaws. He regarded his sons with a brief look of anguish before collapsing to the ground with a profound thud.

At first Vagus felt the earth shake. Did it shake? Or was it he who was shaking? Yes, he was indeed. His body quivered in sheer horror as he watched his father fall. His father couldn’t fall, it wasn’t possible. He was king of this world, king of the jungle, king of Vagus’ world; ruler over his destiny.

“Dad!” Mycaelis was almost screaming. Faster than lighting, he ran to his father’s side. He pulled at Gaius’ arm. “C’mon, Dad! Get up! What are ya playing at? Get up!”

The small Charmander was strong, but only strong enough to lift the Feraligatr’s beefy, muscle-laden arm and give it several firm pulls. Gaius, however, like a persistent stone boulder, refused to budge.

“Dammit, Dad! Get up, for fuck’s sake get up!” Tears began to well in Mycaelis’ eyes.

Vagus softly plodded closer but not before he allowed himself a moment to take in the world around him. His world around him was dying, consumed by fire, by flames and overrun by the corpses of hundreds of murderous monsters. This world was dying and before his very eyes, its king, his own father was dying along with it.

As if the situation couldn’t get any worse, a chorusing cackle of laughter, same as before, could be heard further off in the distance. Both Mycaelis and Vagus turned their attention to it momentary and looked at each other with expressions of horror. At that moment, Gaius’ suddenly limp arm sprang to life and held Mycaelis close.

“Boy,” Gaius rumbled, he opened an eye and gazed up at his son. “You... listen to me clear, you hear?”

“Not listening to shit! Get your...”

“You’re not strong enough!” coughed Gaius, droplets of blood spurting from his mouth. “We... weren’t strong enough.” With unprecedented tenderness he gently held Mycaelis’ tiny hand in his massive claw. “They’re comin’. All of them. We couldn’t... stop th-” He coughed again, bringing up another spate of blood.

“No... no,” Mycaelis’ voice, usually loud and writhe with obnoxiousness had now been reduced to a whimper. “Please, Dad. Please...” Tears rolled down the young Charmander’s cheeks.

Vagus looked over his father’s body and tried to get a glimpse of his wounds. His father was covered in a horrific collation of cuts and slashes which bled profusely, but Vagus couldn’t catch a glimpse of the more severe life threatening wound that he kept hidden under his belly.

“Vagus, come here,” his father’s voice addressed him in a tone he never thought he would speak to him in. To Vagus it didn’t sound

barking, unpleasant or harsh, it sounded warm, comforting, like a father's voice should sound.

Vagus approached. "Yes, sir?"

"Get... out of... here. Take Mycaelis. Take him. Never. Look. Back."

He was asking him to run? For Mycaelis to run? But Laconians never ran, they never retreated or surrendered. Their code in that respect was as cliché as a code could get. But to Vagus, retreating and running had always made sense; it meant you got to live to fight another day. Nonetheless, he would do as his father instructed. Something he had always done.

Vagus dared to ask his father a question. His father always hated him asking questions, they were usually answered with a swift backhanding. Gaius, however, was in no position to backhand Vagus for asking one now.

"Where's mum?" the young Totodile asked. He held onto hope that she was still alive.

"Your... mother is gone. I'm sorry, Son."

Immediately Vagus felt like those words had cut him in two. With those final words, Gaius' arm went limp one final time. Vagus peered into his father's eye as he watched the life drain from it and close. The monster of Prismatic Jungle was no more.

'Son.' Gaius' final word seemed to echo within Vagus' mind.

Vagus felt his heart warm. He was horrified beyond imagining, his mother was dead, his world ablaze, the only life he had ever known was in tatters, but his heart felt warm, suddenly calm. Yet his mind, his constantly questioning mind, questioned his father's final sediment. He had never called him son, never acknowledged him as his. The father he had always known would have washed his mouth out with vinegar if he as much used the word "son" to describe Vagus.

Mycaelis moaned and was overcome by a fit of rage. He pounded and bashed his father's body, bidding him to rise, provoking him to return to life just to render punishment on his son for striking him. He drove his tiny fists into the mass of bloodied scales that was his father's body. "Get up! Get up! Get up!"

He eventually exhausted himself and collapsed onto Gaius' body, moaning and weeping, clinging to the hope that it would rise from the barren jungle soil. He did not.



"Mycaelis..." mumbled Vagus, finding his voice once more.

The cackles in the distance were growing louder. Mycaelis ignored Vagus, perhaps he didn't hear him over his screams of anguish. He would do as his father requested and what his mother would have bade him to do. He was afraid, he was horrified in fact, but he was

still of sound mind and, looking at Mycaelis, he knew that he was the only one in possibly the entire jungle that could still think straight. He had to get his brother out of here.

“Mycaelis!” he moved forward and grabbed his brother by the shoulder.

He still couldn’t get his attention and still couldn’t make himself heard over the screams and cries of Mycaelis’ delirium. His mourning was also luring those laughs and cackles closer. Vagus then did something that he had always wanted to do to his brother when he didn’t listen to him.

Summoning what strength he could in his free arm, Vagus drove a punch into Mycaelis head, knocking him away from his father’s body and onto his backside. “Look at me! Focus!”

And so Mycaelis looked at his brother and focused, he did.

“You heard what he said!” snapped Vagus.

He still didn’t believe his father would ever make such a request, but right now it was the only sane decision that any two children could make in a situation like this. “You know what he wanted us to do!”

Mycaelis gave a sombre nod, but did nothing to move. He couldn’t move. He sat there, seemingly in a daze, making Vagus wonder if he had perhaps punched him too hard. It didn’t matter. They had to get out of here, both of them. With the shrieks and cackles of those creatures creeping nearer, Vagus grabbed Mycaelis’ arm and pulled him to his feet. He took one final look at his father’s bloodied body and allowed Mycaelis to have a moment as well. The Charmander simply stared on with hollow eyes that bore no sign of life or emotion. His mind was miles away, completely detached from his body. He followed Vagus’ gentle tugs like a placid dog on a short leash.

Then Vagus did what his father had bid him to do. He turned around, and didn’t look back. Mycaelis tried to tug away at him, but Vagus

held firm and pulled him back to follow him. The shrieks of the monsters behind them were closing in, they had to run.

“C’mon!” hissed Vagus. He pulled at Mycaelis arm and ran with his brother in tow. Mycaelis was delusional at best, but nonetheless cooperated. “That’s it. C’mon,” Vagus encouraged him.

They both quickened in pace and soon the blazing and smouldering jungle was left behind. Vagus didn’t stop there; he continued to press on, never once stopping to rest. His brother didn’t seem to protest against it, Mycaelis didn’t seem to feel like saying anything at all. Eventually, he became more responsive and was able to run without Vagus’ coercion.

Vagus knew that there was a world outside the one that burned behind him. He had only known of it in stories told by his mother and father, but he knew about them nonetheless. Running through the pitch black jungle, he felt an odd burst of excitement mix with his anxieties. He was free now. Free to explore this new world and the adventures that awaited him.

The darkness of the jungle soon came to pass as the silver light of a full moon began to shimmer through the thinning jungle canopy. Vagus felt something that he rarely ever felt, the breeze of the wind. It was cool and crisp and beckoned him forth. He looked above him and allowed his eyes to drink deep from the ocean of stars that glowed above.

The jungle itself was thinning now, the trees growing thinner and the moss that gathered around their trunks, rarer. Vagus was so entranced by all these new wondrous things that he set a foot wrong, tripping on an upturned root and landing face first on a patch of soft grass.

Grass! Vagus rose from the ground, spitting several grass blades from his gob. There was so little of the stuff in the jungle. How could there be grass?

“Vagus...” Mycaelis whispered behind him, blankly staring into the distance. “Where... where are we?”

Vagus jumped to his feet and discovered why there was grass. There was no jungle... only a sweeping plane before him. It was dark, but the silver light of the moon made everything clear. The acres after acres of grass swayed in the caressing chill of the night wind. For the exhausted siblings, it was a welcoming feeling.

Vagus had no answer for Mycaelis, but instead had many questions. All of them he would find answers to sooner or later. Soon, the sun would rise and, when it did, it would come to open a new horizon and another chapter in Vagus’ life, a new beginning. It would open the door to another world, a world far wider and vaster than the savage confines of a jungle, a world full of adventure and mystery. He looked down at his mother’s blood stained journal and knew that this was a world where his many questions would finally be answered.
